

Those Four Small Words

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Summary:

Bill Denbrough had a complicated relationship with words. Spoken words, specifically. When it came to the written word, it was a different story. Written words were his friends. He could pick them carefully, arrange them and rearrange them to his liking. Written words weren't stubborn, stuttering things to be forced out of his mouth while his cheeks became fervid and his classmates laughed at him. Spoken words were not his friend, and he somehow doubted they ever would be.

And so while it was not surprising to him when words began to cause him trouble, he was surprised to find that the trouble causing words were not his, but someone else's. Four words, specifically, that started all of it.

1. Part One: The Noise

Bill Denbrough had a complicated relationship with words. Spoken words, specifically. When it came to the written word, it was a different story. Written words were his friends. He could pick them carefully, arrange them and rearrange them to his liking. Written words weren't stubborn, stuttering things to be forced out of his mouth while his cheeks became fervid and his classmates laughed at him. Spoken words were not his friend, and he somehow doubted they ever would be.

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"How's it going, Bill?"

It was a Tuesday afternoon, and Bill was headed to lunch. He was at his locker, putting away his second period books when someone had spoken those four words to him. He should have immediately known something was amiss, because while there was nothing particularly worrisome about those words, they were spoken to him by a voice he did not recognize. Which meant that someone other than his friends was talking to him.

That in itself was cause for alarm.

Bill turned, and found it was the new girl from his home room speaking to him. Her name, Bill thought, was something with a "G." Georgina, maybe? No... something like that, though.

"H-hi," Bill said. She looked at him, and after a moment it occurred to him she had asked a question. "It's g-g-going a-alright." He managed. "Y-you?"

Possibly-Georgina smiled. "I'm good," she said, with a wide grin. She had braces on her teeth, big ones that somehow seemed bigger than the mouth they came in. Bill wondered how that could be possible, for someone's braces to be bigger than their mouth. "Just trying to

learn my way around here, I guess,” She laughed awkwardly, and Bill smiled at her, unsure what to say in response. “I’m Georgetta, by the way,” She said, shifting her books around in her arms. “But you can call me Georgie,”

Bill smiled, genuinely this time. “Th-th-that’s my b-brother’s n-name,” He said. “G-georgie.”

Georgetta—or, Georgie—grinned again. “It’s a good name,” she said. “Your brother must be something special.”

Bill nodded. “H-he is,” He said. “J-just don’t t-tell him I s-said so,”

Georgie laughed. “Your secrets safe with me,” she promised, making an X motion over her heart. Bill smiled, though whatever he was going to reply with faded away when he looked up and saw Stan and Eddie, across the hallway.

Eddie was digging around in his fanny-pack, probably looking for some medication or another. Bill thought Stan had been looking at him, but when their eyes met Stan suddenly became very involved with going through the notebook he was holding.

Bill’s heart gave a strange little *thud-thud* in his chest. It was funny, the way seeing Stan made that happen. His heart was beating all the time, Bill knew. Pumping blood, keeping him alive, beating a little rhythm inside his chest. But he was only ever aware of it when Stan Uris walked into the room.

Thud-thud.

It had only gotten worse, too, since *it* had happened. It had been tolerable, before. Manageable, even. Bill had gotten used to in, in fact. He would see Stanley and his heart would pound and it would be so loud Bill was *certain* that someone else would hear it one day, hear it and know his secret. But they never did, and eventually Bill had learned to live with the noise.

But then... well, it had changed. They’d been watching *The Breakfast Club* for the thousandth time and Stan had been complaining about it (as he did with all John Hughes movies—though he continued to

insist they watch them). This time his gripe was with the ending—Molly Ringwald ends up with Judd Nelson, even though he spends the whole movie harassing her.

“*It just doesn’t make any sense*,” Stan bemoaned. “Why would she subject herself to the emotional trauma that dating Judd Nelson would cause? He’s terrible!” Stan shook his head. “I just don’t see the logic. One minute it’s like ‘he’s gross’ and ‘she’s a stuck up bitch’ and the next second it’s like—” He pointed to the screen, where the two were now passionately kissing. “Like that.”

Bill shrugged. “M-maybe th-they like the d-d-drama,” Bill suggested. “It’s i-i-interesting.”

Stan shook his head. “I refuse to believe that people kiss each other just because it’s *interesting*,” He said. “It should be more than that.”

Bill grinned. “Like y-you’d kn-know, Uris,” he teased. “Wh-who’ve you k-kissed?”

“No one, yet,” Stan admitted. Bill raised his eyebrows. “I guess I’m just not *interested* in anyone. I mean, not every girl is Molly Ringwald.”

The words had left Bill’s mouth before he’d even had time to think them over. For years Bill had struggled to get words out, every syllable sticking to his tongue like flypaper. But these words had tumbled out without effort, without thought, and as words occasionally did, without a stutter: “*Does it have to be a girl?*”

Bill had tried to play it off as a joke, but Stan had seen through him. He wouldn’t let it go, and he wouldn’t let Bill run away from it. The way Stan had looked at him, after he’d said that... His heart was never the same again.

What had once been a noisy beating was now a cacophony thundering in his chest. How could he live with that? How could he live every day with Stan standing so close but so far away, and the rumbling noise in his chest that made it impossible to hear anything else?

And then Stan had kissed him, and for a moment there was silence.

It was a peaceful sort of silence, like the calm quiet you hear underwater. Serene, comforting. He was far away from the world, but somehow also closer than he'd ever been before.

When Stan pulled back, Bill remembered how surprised he'd looked. Stan, calculated and logical, rational to a fault, had just done something that couldn't have possibly been explained with sense.

Bill had wanted to say something, then, tell Stan that it was alright and that they would both be okay. But he knew that words would fail him, and that his mouth would ruin any sentiment he tried to express.

So he'd said nothing, and so had Stan. They had not talked about it since.

Seeing Stan in the hallway, Bill wondered if everything he was thinking about was written on his face. He was suddenly sure it was, and that everyone around them—Georgie and Eddie and everyone else—would know what had happened and what they'd done.

Suddenly his view of Stan was blocked, as someone's head came into view. He realized Georgie was still standing there, still talking to him. She was looking at him now with an expectant look on her face, and he realized there was strong possibility she had asked him another question.

"Huh?"

Georgie shook her head. "I said do you want to eat lunch together?"

"O-oh," Bill said. He glanced over her head, to Eddie and Stan still stood. "I u-usually have l-lunch with my friends..."

"What Big Bill *means* to say," Richie said, suddenly appearing at Bill's elbow. "Is that he *usually* has lunch with us but today, he'd *love* to have lunch with you!"

Bill frowned, looking at Richie. Richie raised his eyebrows and nodded his head to Georgie. "Dude, a girl is trying to eat food with

you. Don't be a pussy," he hissed.

Georgie smiled politely, obviously trying to act as if she hadn't very clearly heard what Richie had said. Richie gave Bill a small push forward.

"Enjoy your lunch, kiddos," Richie said, before going to join Eddie and Stan. Bill looked over his shoulder at the three of them as he and Georgie walked away. He finally turned back, just in time to miss Stan look over his own shoulder as well, back at Bill.

At the end of the school day, Bill was once again at his locker, putting away his books from final period. It had been a long day, and lunch with Georgie had been somewhat stressful. She talked a lot, which was good because it meant he didn't have to say much, but she also seemed to expect him to be listening to everything she said, and occasionally comment on it. It wasn't that he was ignoring her, and he didn't mean to be rude... he just found it difficult to focus on what she was saying, when he had so much else on his mind.

"William my good man!" Bill turned, hearing the familiar sound of Richie's terrible english accent. "I know it is not gentlemanly to kiss and tell," he said, walking up to Bill's locker, once more accompanied by Eddie and Stan. "But please, do so."

Stan looked away, his jaw clenched. In addition to the screaming beat of his heart, a small alarm seemed to sound in Bill's head. When he tried to deny it, it took him a full minute before any sound would come out. "W-w-we j-just h-had l-lunch!" He finally managed to protest. "Th-that's it."

Stan rolled his eyes, and Richie looked disappointed. Eddie chuckled. "Told ya," he said to Richie. "Bill's not gonna kiss a girl on the first date," he nudged Bill with his elbow. "He's more romantic than that."

"N-not a d-date!" Bill insisted. Why were they doing this to him? He had always considered Richie and Eddie to be good friends—he best friends. But was it possibly they secretly hated him? That was how it felt. Clearly the two wanted him to suffer. It was the only explanation.

“Kissing on the first date *is* romantic,” Richie replied, dropping the accent. “It shows a girl you can’t wait to get in their pants. They love that shit! I speak from experience.”

Eddie wrinkled his nose, and Stan scoffed. “What experience, Richie?” He asked. “Have you ever even kissed a girl that wasn’t a direct relative of yours?”

Eddie laughed, and Richie glared back and forth at both of them. “Hey,” Richie said. “Eddie’s mom is *not* a direct relative.”

Eddie stopped laughing, but a small smile grew on Stan’s face. The pounding rhythm in Bill’s chest rose in volume, and he felt himself smile as well. For a second, everything felt as if it was back to normal.

The smile slipped off Stan’s face, as he caught sight of something beyond Bill’s shoulder. “Bill, it’s your girlfriend,” He said quietly. Bill turned to see Georgie striding towards them, flashing her usual metal-tinted grin. She waved at him, and he waved feebly back.

When he turned around, he found Stan was already walking away.

2. Part Two: The Jealousy

Towards the end of the school week, Bill began to suspect that Stan was avoiding him. By the time Friday afternoon rolled around, he was certain of it. More than once Bill had seen Stan turn around when they saw each other in the hallways, knew that he was riding his bike the long way home to avoid running into him and—according to Eddie—had explicitly said “I’m avoiding him,” before going into homeroom on Friday morning.

It was that last part that really confirmed it for him.

What Bill couldn’t figure out was *why*. Had he done something, said something? Was this Stan’s final response to the question that neither of them had dared to ask? Bill knew what he felt for Stan, what he’d felt for as long as he could remember. And he had thought that perhaps Stan had certain feelings of his own, too. It was true, that what had happened between them had begun when Bill had let those words tumble from his mouth. His usually stubborn tongue had for once let words roll off them as easily as anyone else would, without force and without thought.

It was Bill’s mouth that had proposed the question, but Stan had used his own to answer. But even his answer only turned out to be another question in itself, one which now stood strangely between them like, forcing them apart like a barrier. And every day they didn’t talk, every day they had avoided each other’s eyes and tried to pretend it was all the same, the barrier had grown and grown.

What are we?

They weren’t dating, they weren’t together. Were they friend, or were they more? Did they tell people, or did they brush it under the rug and forget about it? Did Stan want them to be together, or did he want to move on. Was it something he’d wanted for a while, as Bill had, or was it a mistake?

All these questions ran through Bill’s mind every day, and every time he saw Stan he wanted to ask him, beg him to give him an answer. A solid, real answer. But instead he said nothing, only looked at him

and listened to the screaming in his heart fill the silence between them, the terrible chasm that grew wider each day.

Bill was sure if he could just get the words out, just settle this once and for all, he would feel better. But now that Stan was avoiding him, it seemed like he would never get the chance. And if he did, would he even be brave enough to take it?

He wasn't sure.

At lunch on Friday, Bill tried to get more information of Eddie. Eddie was a good friend, and loyal as hell, but he typically couldn't be trusted to keep a secret. If he knew anything, Bill was certain he wouldn't hide it from him.

"D-do you kn-know wh-why Stan is a-avoiding me?" Bill asked, as Eddie dry swallowed his lunch time vitamins. Richie made a grossed out noise, as he always did when Eddie took large pills without water. Eddie shook his head.

"Nope, he didn't tell me," Eddie said, picking up the tuna fish sandwich his mother had packed him for lunch. "Just said he was avoiding you, but he wouldn't say why. He's seemed kind of mad all week though,"

Bills heart sank, "He's m-mad?"

"Wow, that's *weird*, " Richie said, rolling his eyes. "Stan never gets mad! He's so calm and centered."

"Ok so I can tell you're being sarcastic," Eddie said, "But like, Stan is pretty calm. You just drive him up the wall, so he's always pissed off at you. But for the rest of us, yeah, he doesn't really get too mad."

Richie glared. "Well obviously not, since he's mad at Bill now," Richie replied. He grinned, "Maybe he's jealous about you and Girl-Georgie," Richie joked. "I mean you guys had lunch together what, three times this week?"

Bill stared at him, feeling like a light bulb had turned on inside his brain. Could that be it? Could Stan have been *jealous*? The idea seemed ridiculous to him--Sure, Georgie was nice and she had kind

eyes and pretty hair--but Stan was *Stan*. Stan was... Well, everything. How could he possibly think anyone else could even come close to that?

As ridiculous as it seemed, it made sense. How would Stan know what Bill thought of him? How would Stan know that Georgie was just a nice girl who went to their school, and nothing more than that. Everything Bill thought about Stan, and everything he didn't think about Georgie... He had never told him any of that. Never had the words to say it, to let him know how he felt... So how could Stan know?

Bill stood up suddenly, needing to find Stan. He had to tell him, had to set the record straight. "I need to find Stan," He said.

Eddie and Richie looked up at him, surprised. "Um... ok?" Richie said, looking confused,

"He's talking to Mr. Johnson about the science homework we have on the weekend," Eddie said. "You'll have to talk to him later. He was pretty concerned about failing everything--I mean he didn't fail anything but he always thinks he's about to-- so they're probably gonna be talking for a while."

"O-oh." Bill said. He sat back down. "Ok."

Bill would find Stan, and confess the way he felt to him. He would set him straight about Georgie, and they would finally talk about what had happened between them. Even if he didn't have the words to say it the way he wanted to do, or to make it sound right, he would force them to come out of his stubborn mouth even if it killed him to do it.

But it would have to wait until after lunch.

After school ended, Bill took Silver and raced over to the park he knew Stan had to pass through, if he was taking the long way home (as he had done each day that week). He was sweaty and out of breath by the time he got there, but he hoped that he'd given himself enough time to catch his breath before Stan showed up.

His hopes were almost immediately dashed when Stan rode up on his own bike a moment later. Stan spotted him, and for a moment Bill thought he was just going to keep going, but after a moment the bike slowed and Stan came to a stop beside him.

“This isn’t on your route,” Stan said, climbing off his bike.

Bill opened his mouth, but no words were able to come out. His heart was pounding, and he was no longer sure it was just from the bike ride. He gestured to himself, and managed to make a few noises “I-I-I...”

Stan shook his head. “Take a breath, Bill. Give it a moment.”

Bill swallowed. He took a breath in through his nose, and let it slowly out through his mouth. He counted to ten, and then tried again. “H-have y-you been avoiding m-me?” He asked slowly.

Glancing away, Stan said “No, what makes you think I have been?”

“Eh-eddie,” He said. “T-told me you were.”

Stan scrunched up his mouth. “ *Eddie*, ” muttered. “Can’t tell him anything....”

Bill smiled, and shook his head. “N-no,” He agreed. “Y-you c-can’t.”

Stan looked back at him. “Look, it’s not that—I wasn’t avoiding you. I was just trying... I was trying to *not* see you.”

Bill frowned. “Th-that’s what a-avoiding *means*.” He said. Stan cringed. “Wh-why?”

Likely to give himself something to do other than answer Bill’s question, Stan began to dig through his backpack, looking for something. Bill wondered if he was hoping to find an answer to Bill’s question in there.

“I think I forgot my social studies textbook back at school,” Stan said. “I should go get that, we have a lot of homework this weekend and —”

"Y-you d-don't have s-s-social studies this s-semester," Bill reminded him.

"I mean science textbook," Stan corrected.

Bill glanced into the open backpack. "Th-that's y-your s-s-science book," Bill said, pointing to the purple textbook he could see at the back of the bag. Stan quickly closed the bag. "Wh-why a-are y-you avoiding m-me?"

Stan sighed. "Alright, it wasn't... it wasn't that I wanted to avoid you I just... everytime I see you, you're with *her*."

Bill stared. He couldn't believe it. Richie had--possibly for the first time in his life--been right. Stan *was* jealous.

"It's stupid," Stan muttered, looking away again. "I'm just being stupid, making things into something they shouldn't be. I mean, I know *I* kissed *you*, and I didn't even ask first I just jumped on you... I can't do that, and then expect you're just going to," He shook head. "It's stupid. I'm stupid and--"

When Bill had ridden his bike out to the park to meet Stan, he'd had every intention of talking things over with him. They were going to sort out what had happened, and he was going to calmly stutter his way through an explanation of what Georgie did not mean to him, and what Stan did.

But as he stood there, listening to Stan rattle on about how stupid he was, it occurred to Bill that perhaps words were not the answer.

Stepping forward, Bill was distantly aware that the screaming of his heart had reached full pitch, but he knew that in a moment it would quiet, as it had before. The beckoning silence and sense of calm and certainty that had come with it moved him forward, despite the nervousness in his chest and the way his feet felt like led. Stan looked up, his rant slowing as he noticed Bill's closeness.

The last thing Bill saw before closing the distance between them as he pressed his mouth against Stan's was a look of surprise on Stan's face. And then silence blanketed him, the same cool calmness that he

felt the first time they kissed, and would continue to feel each time they did for years after.

It was a funny thing, standing in the middle of the park kissing Stan Uris. Bill had always sort of had an unconscious resentment, for his mouth. It had always been a source of misery for him, this thing that just refused to work properly, getting him in trouble and laughed at, making him a freak and a loser...

Kissing Stan, Bill thought that maybe it wasn't his mouths fault at all. Maybe he'd just been using it wrong, all these years. Maybe *this* was what it was really for. Not talking, not stuttering words that never really expressed what he wanted to say anyhow... Maybe instead of all of that, he was supposed to use it to kiss Stan Uris. Just that, and only that.

It seemed like a definite possibility.

Somewhere, distantly, Bill heard someone say something. It sounded like "Oh, gee," but he couldn't have been certain. Stan pulled back, a look of panic spreading across his face.

Bill looked and saw it was Georgie--girl Georgie, not his brother--and a little kid who may have been real-Georgie's age. The kid was holding Georgie's hand. Bill supposed it was her brother. He looked confused, and was staring at them with a hard frown.

Georgie herself looked like she was on the verge of tears. The sight of it made a knot twist itself around Bill's guts—he had done nothing wrong, and he knew that, but he hadn't wanted this. Georgie clearly liked him, and even if he didn't feel the same way, she seemed nice and he had not wanted to hurt her. "G-georgie—" Bill said, stepping towards her.

The little boy with her seemed confused. "What's wrong Georgie?" He asked, tugging his sisters arm. She turned away, likely to hide the tear that had begun to roll down her cheeks.

"P-please d-don't—" Bill stammered, feeling somewhat dizzy. Behind him, Stan was getting on his bike, muttering something about needing to be home. Bill turned back to him, wanting to tell him not

to go. They still needed to talk... but he was already pedalling away.

Bill stared after him, feeling like a moron. He had ruined it, ruined everything and now Georgie had gotten caught up in his big mess. In a moment he would go comfort her, tell her that he was sorry and explain that he had never meant to hurt her. And she would cry, but eventually the tears would stop and she would say she understood, and it was fine. She would apologize for being emotional and promise to keep what she had seen a secret, if that was what he wanted. In a moment he would sort things out... but for a second longer Bill just stood there, staring at Stan and watching him leave.

He seemed to be doing a lot of that lately.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi, my names Nicole and I'm here to talk to you and about the benefit of leaving comments!

Did you know that one single comment can motivate an author to write more of, or even finish a fanfiction? For merely one minute of your time, you too can help motivate a depressed fic writer to roll out of bed and write that chapter they've been putting off. It's free, it's easy, it's environmentally friendly and most importantly, it's for a good cause. Donate your comments today, and receive the author's gratitude and an semi-incoherent but very excited response in return!

Author's Note:

Originally written as a prompt on tumblr for bysetas, but it sort of got away from me!